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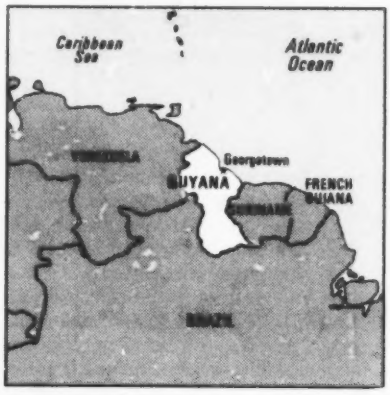
background notes

Guyana

United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs

May 1989



Official Name:
Co-Operative Republic of Guyana

PROFILE

Geography

Area: 215,000 sq. km. (83,000 sq. mi.); about the size of Idaho. **Cities:** *Capital*—Georgetown. *Other cities*—Linden and New Amsterdam. **Terrain:** Coastal plain, inland highlands, rain forest, savanna. **Climate:** Tropical.

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*—Guyanese (sing. and pl.). **Population** (1986 est.): 756,072. **Annual growth rate:** Slightly less than zero. **Ethnic groups:** East Indian 49.6%, African 30.4%, mixed 14.1%, European and Chinese 0.5%, **Religions:** Christian 46%. Hindu 37%. Muslin 9%. Other 8%. **Languages:** English, Guyanese Creole, Amerindian dialects. **Education:** *Years compulsory*—ages 5–14. *Attendance* (1986, primary)—67.3%. *Literacy*—91.3%. **Health:** *Infant mortality rate*—49/1,600. *Life expectancy*—65 yrs. **Work force** (271,534): *Agriculture*—33.8% *Industry and commerce*—44.5%. *Services*—21.7%. *Public sector employment*—approx. 30%.

Government

Type: Republic within the Commonwealth. **Independence:** May 26, 1966. **Republic:** February 23, 1970. **Constitution:** 1980.

Branches: *Executive*—executive president (chief of state and head of government), prime minister. *Legislative*—unicameral National Assembly (53 elected members). *Judicial*—Court of Appeal, High Court.

Subdivisions: 10 regions.

Political parties: People's National Congress (PNC). People's Progressive Party (PPP). Working People's Alliance (WPA). United Force (UF). Democractic Labour Movement (DLM). **Suffrage:** Universal over 18.

Central government budget (1987 est.): $229.1 million.

Defense: 9% of GDP.

Flag: Green background (representing agriculture and forests) with a red triangle (zeal) edged with black (endurance) superimposed on a yellow triangle (mineral wealth) edged with white (waters).

Economy

GNP (1987 est.): $239.3 million. **Annual growth rate** (1986): 0.3%. **Per capita income** (1987 est.): $317. **Avg. inflation rate** (1986 est.): 30%.

Natural resources: Bauxite, gold, diamonds, hardwood timber, shrimp, fish.

Agriculture (30% of GDP): *Products*—sugar, riceland under cultivation, 1%.

Industry (24% of GDP): *Types*—bauxite, mining, manufacturing, processing.

Trade (1986): *Exports*—$241.7 million: bauxite, sugar, rice, timber, gold, shrimp. *Major markets*—U.K., U.S. (26.5%, 1986), bauxite, sugar, shrimp, CARICOM countries. *Imports*—$231.2 million. *Major suppliers*—Venezuela, U.S. (22.4%, 1986), U.K.

Official exchange rate (since January 16, 1987): 10 Guyana dollars = U.S.$1.

Membership in International Organizations

UN and some of its specialized and related agencies, including the Generalized Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), International Labor Organization (ILO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank; Caribbean Community (CARICOM); Caribbean Development Bank (CDB); Commonwealth; Group of 77; International Bauxite Association; Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); Latin American Economic System (SELA); Nonaligned Movement.

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Guyana

ATLANTIC OCEAN
VENEZUELA
BRAZIL
SURINAME
Mabaruma
Amakura
Jonestown
Port Kaituma
Benma
Matthews Ridge
Barama
Waini
Charity
Anna Regina
Suddie
Vreed en Hoop
Timehri International Airport
Rosignol
Bartica
Linden
Mara
Corriverton
Rickerie
Totness
Issano
Mazaruni
Essequibo
Demerara
Berbice
Ituni
Kwakwani
Mahdia
Kaieteur Fall
Mount Roraima
Rio Cuquenán
Rio Cuyuni
disputed by Venezuela
Wenamu
Rio Yuruari
Cuyuni
Potaro
Caranyas
Courantyne
Corentyne River
Annai
Apoteri
Rupununi
Rio Tacutu
Rio Uraricoera
Lethem
Bonfim
Boa Vista
Aishalton
Takutu
New
disputed by Suriname
Rio Branco
Rio Cafuini
Rio Anauá
Irong
0 50 100 Kilometers
0 50 100 Miles
Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative
International boundary
National capital
Railroad
Road
International airport

GEOGRAPHY

Guyana is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean, Brazil, Suriname, and Venezuela. The country is divided into three areas:

- An inland forest covering about 85% of the total area;
- A grass-covered savanna of some 20,700 square kilometers (8,000 sq. mi.) in hitherland; and
- A coastal plain 16–65 kilometers (10–40 mi.) wide.

Four main rivers flow from south to north—the Essequibo, Demerara, Berbice, and Corentyne. The climate is tropical, but the northeast trade winds mitigate the heat along the coast, where temperatures vary between 22–32 °C (80 °F). With extremes of 15 °C (60 °F) and 39 °C (103 °F). Average annual rainfall ranges from 200 to 260 centimeters (80–100 inches) in different regions. The coastal rainy seasons are from April to July and November to January.

PEOPLE

Guyana's population comprises five main ethnic groups–East Indian, African, Amerindian, Chinese, and Portuguese. Ninety percent of the inhabitants live along the coast, where population density is more than 115 persons per square kilometer (380/sq. mi.). The population density for Guyana as a whole is slightly more than three persons per square kilometer.

Although the government has provided free education from nursery school to the university level since 1975, it has not allocated sufficient funds to maintain the standards of what had been regarded as the best educational system in the region. Many school buildings are in poor condition; there is a shortage of text and exercise books; and the number of teachers has declined. In September 1985, the Government of Guyana opened Presidents College, the country's first boarding school, which draws its students by nationwide competitive examination from the top 2% of Guyana's schoolchildren. Guyana has an estimated adult literacy rate of 91.3%.

Cultural Achievements

Guyana's cultural expression reflects its separate ethnic contributions and has a regional rather than a universal orientation. A number of its best-known novelists have lived aboard, including Edgar Mittelholzer, *The Kwayana Family Trilogy*; Christopher Nicole, *Ratoon*, Jan Carew, *Black Midas*, and E.R. Braithwaite, *To Sir With Love*. Another prominent, avant-garde writer is Wilson Harris, *The Palace and the Peacock*. Among the country's outstanding poets are Martin Carter and A.J. Seymour, who wrote the booklet *I Was Born in Georgetown*. Denis Williams has gained fame as a painter, novelist, curator, and anthropologist. Philip Moore is well known for his wood sculptures, which show African influence.

The Guyana Theater Guild, active for more than 20 years, stages productions based largely on Caribbean and U.S. plays. Also popular in Guyana are steel drum bands and, particularly among Indo-Guyanese, East Indian classical music and dance. Cricket is the national sport.

HISTORY

"Guiana" was the name given the area sighted by Columbus in 1498, comprising modern Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, and parts of Brazil and Venezuela. The Dutch settled in Guyana in the late 16th century, when the Amerindians welcomed them as trading partners. However, colonial control and the exploitation of the Amerindians—and later of African slaves—followed. Interrupted briefly by the French and British, Dutch control ended when the British became the de facto rulers in 1796. In 1815, the colonies of Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice were officially ceded to the British by the Congress of Vienna and, in 1831, were consolidated as British Guiana.

Following the abolition of slavery in 1834, indentured workers were brought primarily from India but also from Portugal and China. The British stopped the practice in 1917. A scheme in 1862 to bring black workers from the United States was unsuccessful.

The populace drawn from these diverse origins have coexisted peacefully for the most part. Slave revolts, such as the one in 1763 led by Guyana's national hero, Cuffy, stressed the desire to obtain basic rights and were underscored by a willingness to compromise. Labor disputes in the period following full emancipation in 1834 showed similar characteristics. The development of organized labor was led by H.N. Critchlow, the father of local trade unionism. Racial disturbances erupted between East Indians and blacks during the 1962–64 period. However, the basically pacific nature of the Guyanese, including the Amerindians in communal settlements, contributed to a deescalation of the racial problems.

The development of modern politics occasionally has been turbulent. The British suspended the constitution in 1953 because they perceived communist subversion. Independence was achieved in 1966, and Guyana became a republic on February 23, 1970, the anniversary of the Cuffy slave rebellion. From 1964 to 1985, Forbes Burnham of the People's National Congress (PNC) ruled Guyana, first as prime minister and later, after the adoption of a new constitution in 1980, as executive president. Following Burnham's death in August 1985, Hugh Desmond Hoyte assumed the presidency and was formally elected to that position in the December 1985 national elections.

GOVERNMENT

Guyana has a modified parliamentary government. Legislative power rests in a unicameral National Assembly. There are 53 elective seats, which are filled for 5-year terms by proportional representation. An additional 12 appointed assembly members represent local and regional governments. Executive authority is exercised by the executive president, who also is the leader of the majority party in the National Assembly. The president appoints and supervises a government that includes a prime minister, who serves as first vice president; three other vice presidents, who also hold the title of Deputy Prime Minister; an additional deputy prime minister; and numerous senior ministers, ministers of state, and parliamentary secretaries. Currently, the president supervises a nine-member cabinet, consisting of the prime minister, all deputy prime ministers, and four senior ministers. In theory, the cabinet is responsible to the National Assembly. Several ministers are not elected members of parliament but serve as nonelected members, which permits them to debate but not to vote.

The highest judicial bodies are the Court of Appeal, headed by a chancellor of the judiciary, and the High Court, presided over by a chief justice. The chancellor and the chief justice are appointed by the president.

For administrative purposes, Guyana is divided into 10 regions, each headed by a chairman who presides over

An example of the Victorian architecture that still characterizes much of Georgetown.

a regional democratic council. Local communities are administered by village or city councils.

Principal Government Officials

Executive President—Hugh Desmond Hoyte
Prime Minister and First Vice President—Hamilton Green
Foreign Minister—Rashleigh Jackson

Ambassador to the United States—Dr. Cedric Grant
Permanent Representative to the United Nations—Rudy Insanally

Guyana maintains an embassy in the United States at 2490 Tracy Place, NW., Washington, D.C. 20008 (tel. 202–276–6900) and the following constituent missions:

Consulate General and Permanent Mission to the United Nations, 622 Third Avenue, 35th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10017

Consulate, 2301 Lituancia Avenue, East Chicago, Indiana 46312 (tel. 212–953–0920/1; 212–953–0930);

Consulate, 2950 Los Feliz Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90067 (tel. 213–665–3243); and

Consulate, P.O. Box 4362, Waco, Texas 76705 (tel. 817–799–3611).

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Since 1964, the People's National Congress (PNC) has dominated the nation's politics. The PNC draws its support primarily from urban blacks and declares itself a socialist party whose purpose is to make Guyana a nonaligned socialist state. PNC socialism, however, includes the right of the public, private, and cooperative sectors to function in the economy. In August 1987, at the PNC Biennial Congress, President Hoyte announced that the PNC rejects orthodox communism and the one-party state.

The PNC came to power in the 1964 elections in a coalition government with the Conservative United Force. In official returns of the December 1968 elections, the PNC won a majority of the seats in the National Assembly and was able to form a government without a coalition partner. The PNC increased its parliamentary majority to 66% in the 1973 elections and to more than 75% in the 1980 and 1985 elections. However, questions have arisen as to the fairness of the last elections.

East Indian Guyanese traditionally have backed the main opposition party, the People's Progressive Party (PPP), headed by Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the former premier (1957–64) and current minority leader. The PPP is an orthodox, Moscow-aligned communist party. The late Forbes Burnham shared the PPP leadership with Dr. Jagan until he broke with the party in 1955 and later formed the PNC. Indo-Guyanese rice farmers and sugar workers in the rural areas form the bulk of the PPP's support. Race has been a dominant political influence in Guyana, with political support based more on ethnicity than on ideology. The PPP won elections in 1953, 1957, and 1961. In 1973, it obtained 14 parliamentary seats but boycotted the National Assembly because it claimed widespread election fraud. In 1975, the PPP announced that it would lend "critical support" to the PNC government, and party members assumed their seats the following year. Recently, support for the PPP, which won 10 seats in the 1980 elections and only 8 in the 1985, seems to have waned.

The Working People's Alliance (WPA), a small, multiethnic, "independent Marxist" political party, boycotted the 1980 elections on the grounds that it expected them to be rigged. The WPA made moderate gains in membership until June 1980, when its leader, Walter Rodney, died in a bomb blast. In the 1985 elections, the WPA won a single seat in Parliament.

In addition to these parties, there are a few minor centrist or conservative political groups. All boycotted the 1980 elections except the United Force, which won one seat in the National Assembly; in 1985, it gained another seat. Under the constitution, the next elections are due in December 1990.

Since independence, some gains have been made in providing social benefits to a broader section of the population, specifically in health (e.g., establishment of rural clinics), education, housing, transportation (e.g., road and bridge building), essential services, agriculture, and rural development. However, during Burnham's last years, the government's emphasis on building a socialist society, deteriorating human rights and civil liberties, emigration of skilled workers, as well as other factors, led to a significant decline in the overall quality of life in Guyana. During his 3½ years in office, President Hoyte has taken considerable steps aimed at stemming the economic decline, including appointing a number of competent technocrats to his government, strengthening financial controls over the parastatals, and supporting the private sector.

The 1987 human rights report published by the U.S. Department of State noted that Guyana's human rights record has been mixed, citing police harrassment and misconduct and infringements of the freedom of the press as major areas of concern. Nevertheless, Guyana has no political prisoners, special courts, political disappearances, or summary execution. Moreover, freedoms of religion, speech, movement, and rights of *habeas corpus* and fair trial are generally respected.

ECONOMY

Three sectors—public, private, and cooperative—comprise the Guyanese economy. Agriculture and mining are the most important productive activities, with sugar, rice, and bauxite accounting for more than 80% of export earnings. Additional foreign exchange is earned by the exports of shrimp, gold, diamonds, hardwood timber, garments, and locally assembled stoves and refrigerators.

Guyana's arrears on debts to foreign creditors has meant limited availability of foreign exchange and reduced the capacity to import necessary raw materials, spare parts, and equipment, thereby further reducing production.

External public debt, including arrears, totaled U.S. $1.75 billion at the end of December 1987. Net international reserves were negative U.S. $647 million by mid-1987.

Many local industries can produce only intermittently because of the foreign exchange shortage, import restrictions, and numerous power outages. Production also is affected by rapid employee turnover. The decline of production has led to increasing unemployment. Although no reliable statistics exist, combined unemployment and underemployment are estimated at about 30%. Emigration is substantial.

The ban on wheat importation was lifted in 1984. Since 1986, Guyana has received wheat from the United States through a PL 480 Food for Peace program. However, restrictions remain in effect on the importation of certain staple food items.

As import restrictions increased, a large and growing informal economy developed. In the parallel market, foreign currency trades at more than 30 Guyanese dollars to U.S. $1, while the official rate is only 10 Guyanese dollars to U.S. $1. In a move to limit the black market and attract more foreign exchange into the official economy, in January 1987, the government approved foreign exchange transactions for foreign investors and domestic gold miners at commerical banks, with the banks setting more competitive exchange rates. The rate at this special "window" is 21 Guyana dollars equals U.S. $1.

The government-owned sugar corporation, Guysuco, controls sugar manufacturing operations as well as the marketing of raw sugar. With more than 23,000 direct employees, the sugar industry is the largest employer in Guyana.

The bauxite sector also is run by a government-owned company, the Guyana mining enterprise, Guymine. Bauxite sales have declined in recent years, as Guyana has lost its market share to other producers and used bauxite in lieu of cash in countertrade arrangements, especially for petroleum and capital equipment. During the early 1980s, due to high production costs and low world prices and production, the bauxite industry was a net user of foreign exchange, draining funds from other productive areas of the economy. Total bauxite produc-

Travel Notes

Customs, duties, and passage: Visas are required of Americans visiting Guyana. Travelers need a valid passport and a return ticket or proof of sufficient funds for onward passage. A yellow fever immunization is required of travelers coming from most African and Latin American countries, and polio, typhus, hepatitis, and malaria shots are recommended for travel to remote areas. Certain people in business and journalism require entry permits before arrival.

Climate and clothing: Summer clothing, including the popular, tieless shirt-jac, is worn year round in Georgetown. A light raincoat or umbrella is recommended in cool, rainy weather.

Health: Doctors and hospital facilities in Georgetown are limited, and medical services throughout Guyana are inadequate. Malaria is endemic in some areas outside Georgetown. Drinking water should be boiled. Exposure to Dengue fever also is a potential health hazard.

Currency: Guyana's currency is the Guyana dollar.

Transportation: Although two-lane, paved roads connect Georgetown with Corriverton to the east and Linden to the south, many other roads do not meet modern standards. Traffic moves on the left. In Georgetown, buses are available sometimes but do not run regularly. Taxi service is usually available.

Telecommunications: Telegraph service is available to the U.S. Telephone service is available in Georgetown, throughout the settled coastal area, and to a number of interior points.

Tourist attractions: Kaieteur Falls, four times as high as Niagara, is located in thick jungle in the interior and is usually reached by small aircraft. In the southern savanna plains of the Rupununi, riding, hunting, fishing, and swimming are available at Manari. Excursions are difficult to arrange—leave them to local travel agents. Guyana is 2 hours ahead of eastern standard time and does not observe daylight saving time.

National holidays: Local establishments and the U.S. Embassy are closed on the following Guyanese national holidays.

New Year's Day	January 1
Youman Nabi	early January*
Republic Day	February 23
Phagwah	early March*
Good Friday and Easter Monday	early spring*
Labor Day	May 1
Caribbean Day	July 5
Freedom Day	August 1
Eid al Alzha	early autumn*
Divali	mid-autumn*
Christmas	December 25
Boxing Day	December 26

*Dates varies; check ahead.

Elevated view of Kingston, a suburb of Georgetown.

tion fell to 1.4 million metric tons (MT), in 1986 and 1.3 million MT in 1987. Despite reduced production, bauxite export earnings increased marginally in 1987 due to improved world market prices.

Rice-growing is dominated by private farmers, with extensive government involvement in allocation of foreign inputs, maintenance of infrastructure, and marketing. After rice production reached 183,000 metric tons in 1986, production has dropped to 146,000 MT in 1987 and an estimated 90,000 MT in 1988, due to bad weather, plant disease, lack of foreign exchange for chemicals and other needs, low prices paid to farmers, and a consequent decline in the number of acres planted.

In the gold industry, the government has negotiated special concessions with private gold miners who have encouraged miners to sell more of their gold production to the government's gold board, as required by law. In 1987, declared production rose to 662.2 kilograms from 436.3 kilograms in 1986. Nevertheless, miners allegedly continue to sell the majority of their gold on the parallel market, where prices remain higher.

The volume of U.S.-Guyana trade has declined during the 1980s. In 1988, Guyana experienced a trade surplus with the United States, importing U.S. $57.3 million worth of goods and exporting U.S.$66.8 million. Other major trading partners are the United Kingdom and Venezuela. In 1986, Venezuela replaced Trinidad as Guyana's main supplier of petroleum products.

Guyana is a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which is headquartered in Georgetown. It also is a member of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). Guyana strongly supports the concept of regional integration. It played an important role in the founding of CARICOM, but the heavy burden it has acquired limits its ability to exert leadership in trade liberalization and other regional activities. Guyana also is a charter member of the International Bauxite Organization and the Latin American and Caribbean Sugar Producers and Exporters Association.

President Hoyte and his government have taken several steps to stimulate economic recovery, such as lifting most price controls, improving legislation affecting mining and oil exploration, and endorsing an investment policy receptive to foreign investment. Several nonperforming public companies have been offered for sale, and others may be considered for divestment. Guysuco, the government-owned sugar monopoly, has undertaken a major diversification program, branching out into aquaculture, livestock raising, and legume growing; has closed two sugar factories; and has decreased marginally productive acreage. The government recently enacted tax reforms designed to promote exports and agricultural production in the private sector. Guyana has shown a new openness toward foreign private investment, especially in the area of natural resources development.

Economic revitalization can succeed only within the general framework of an austerity program that contains certain macroeconomic policy measures and generates new flows of funds, and a Paris Club rescheduling of Guyana's official bilateral debts that is contingent upon reaching an International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreement. Without such an agreement, many aid donors are unwilling to pledge needed assistance to Guyana. Intensive discussions among the IMF, the government, and potential donors have been underway to develop a workable program. Because Guyana is so heavily indebted—its public debt constitutes a higher percentage of its GDP than Mexico's or Brazil's—developing and financing a program is complex and difficult.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Since independence in 1966, Guyana has aspired to an increasingly influential role in international affairs, particularly among the Third World and nonaligned nations. It has served twice on the UN Security Council—in 1975–76 and in 1982–83. Guyana is a member of the coordinating bureau of the Nonaligned Movement and also is a member of the Commonwealth. It serves on the executive boards of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Economic and Social Council. Vice President, Deputy Prime Minister, and Attorney General Mohamed Shahabuddeen was elected to the International Court of Justice in 1987.

Guyana maintains relations and has resident diplomatic missions in Georgetown with such diverse nations as Cuba, China, Nicaragua, North and South Korea, the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Brazil, Suriname, Venezuela, and Trinidad and Tobago. The Guyanese Government supports Third World ideas, such as a "new world information order," a "new international economic order," and "south–south cooperation."

During the past 3 years, Guyana has shown a desire to move toward friendlier relations with the United States and other Western countries.

Two neighbors have longstanding territorial disputes with Guyana. Venezuela asserts a claim to all of Guyana west of the Essequibo River—some 62% of Guyana's territory. Because of this unresolved territorial claim, Guyana has been prevented from becoming a full member of the Organization of American States (OAS). In 1986, however, it was allowed observer status in the OAS. Currently, Venezuela and Guyana are waiting for the UN Secretary General's recommendation on the means to peaceful settlement under the terms of the 1966 Geneva Agreement. In addition to Venezuela's larger claim, neighboring Suriname also asserts claims to all territory east of Guyana's New River, a largely unhabituated area of some 15, 000 square kilometers (6,000 sq. mi.) in southeast Guyana. Guyana regards its legal claim to all its territory as sound.

U.S.-GUYANESE RELATIONS

During the past 3 years, the Government of Guyana has sought improved relations with the United States as part of a movement toward genuine political nonalignment. The government has taken a number of steps to reform the economy and stimulate investment and economic growth. Altogether, since Guyana's independence, the United States has provided it with more than $420 million in assistance. Although there currently is no U.S. Agency for International Development mission in Guyana, the United States continues to supply humanitarian food aid to Guyana, totaling almost $19 million since 1986. U.S. policy toward Guyana seeks to promote stability, democracy, development, and human rights.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassador—Theresa A. Tull
Deputy Chief of Mission—Dennis K. Hays
Political Officer—Donald G. Teitelbaum
Consul—Nicholas M. Williams
Economic Officer—James L. Dudley
Labor Officer—Steven Zate
Public Affairs Officer (USIS)—Peter Quasius

The U.S. Embassy in Guyana is located at 31 Main Street, Georgetown (tel. (592) (02) 54900/9).■

Further Information

These titles are provided as a general indication of material published on this country. The Department of State does not endorse unofficial publications.

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For information on economic trends, commercial development, production, trade regulations, and tariff rates, contact the International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, DC 20230 or any Commerce Department district office.

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